

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2047
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMCONSUL MADRAS
CINCPAC

UNCLAS NEW DELHI 8800

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT IN BG
SUBJECT: DELHI PRESS REACTION TO GEN. ZIA'S VICTORY IN BANGLADESH
GOI CONGRATULATES HIM

1. MOST DELHI PAPERS TODAY (JUNE 6) CARRY EDITORIAL
REACTION TO GEN. ZIA'S VICTORY IN THE BANGLADESH
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. MOST OF THE EDITORIALS ARE
CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC AND EXPRESS THE HOPE THAT ZIA'S
LARGE MARGIN OF VICTORY WILL HELP ENSURE STABILITY IN
THE COUNTRY.

2. THE EDITORIALS GENERALLY DESCRIBE THE VICTORY AS
NO GREAT SURPRISE, BUT SEVERAL PAPERS REMARK THAT THE
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MARGIN IS GREATER THAN EXPECTED. FROM THIS, THE EDITORIALISTS
ALLUDE TO CHARGES OF FOUL PLAY IN THE
ELECTION, BUT DO NOT COME TO A DEFINITE CONCLUSION
AS TO WHETHER LARGE-SCALE RIGGING ACTUALLY OCCURRED.
THE "STATESMAN", FOR EXAMPLE, CONCEDED THAT SOME
QUESTIONABLE PRACTICES MAY HAVE OCCURRED, BUT NOT A
ON A LARGE ENOUGH SCALE TO HAVE INFLUENCED THE OUTCOME.

THE "TIMES OF INDIA" AND "INDIAN EXPRESS" PREFER TO WITHHOLD FINAL JUDGEMENT ON THE RIGGING QUESTION UNTIL THE PICTURE IS CLEARER. ALMOST ALL THE COMMENT, HOWEVER, REFERS TO THE ADVANTAGES WHICH GEN. ZIA AND HIS PARTY HELD GOING INTO THE CAMPAIGN: THE FACT THAT HE WAS IN POWER, THE LARGE RESOURCES WHICH HE CONTROLLED, SUPPORT FROM THE ADMINISTRATIVE APPARATUS, AND HIS OWN CHARISMATIC IMAGE AS WELL AS HIS GENERALLY GOOD RECORD IN OFFICE. ON THE OTHER SIDE, THE EDITORIALS POINT TO THE HANDICAPS OF THE OPPOSITION FRONT: LACK OF TIME FOR CAMPAIGN PREPARATIONS, INADEQUATE FINANCIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES, AND INTERNAL DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE FRONT ITSELF.

3. SEVERAL PAPERS CRITICIZE ZIA'S CAMPAIGN TACTIC OF "INDIA BAITING." THE "EXPRESS" AND "STATESMAN" DESCRIBE HIS EFFORTS TO PORTRAY THE OPPOSITION AS A GROUP WILLING TO SELL THE COUNTRY'S INTERESTS ACROSS ITS BORDERS AS "UNNECESSARY AND FICTITIOUS PROPAGANDA" AND EXPRESS THE HOPE THAT HE WILL DISCARD THE RHETORIC OF "INDIAN EXPANSIONISM" NOW THAT HE HAS SECURED HIS POSITION.

4. MOST PAPERS ARE CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC THAT GEN. ZIA'S VICTORY WILL PRDUCE GREATER STABILITY IN BANGLADESH. HE IS SEEN TO BE IN A FAR STRENGTHENED POSITION, IN THAT
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THE ELECTION HAS LEGITIMIZED HIS RULE. THE "HINDUSTAN TIMES" NOTES THAT GEN. ZIA "CAN NOW LOOK TO THE FUTURE WITH CONFIDENCE." THE "STATESMAN" EDITORIAL OBSERVED: "TO THE EXTENT HIS ELECTION IS A GUARANTEE OF FURTHER STABILITY AND PROGRESS, IT WILL BE WELCOMED BY DACCA'S WELL-WISHERS, INCLUDING INDIA." PERHAPS THE FRIENDLIEST EDITORIAL WAS IN THE CONGRESS (I)-AFFILIATED "NATIONAL HERALD." THE "HERALD" GENERALLY PRAISED ZIA'S RULE AS HAVING BEEN "FAIRLY SATISFACTORY." NOW, HE "HAS ESTABLISHED HIS RIGHT TO RULE BANGLADESH. HIS GOVERNMENT HAS GAINED A DEMOCRATIC APPEARANCE...HE CAN TAKE DECISIVE STEPS TO SOLVE THE PRESSING PROBLEMS OF HIS COUNTRY." THE "TIMES OF INDIA" IS MORE CAUTIOUS, BUT NOTES THAT "THE SITUATION IN BANGLADESH IS GENERALLY FAVORABLE FOR THE CONSOLIDATION OF GENERAL ZIA'S POSITION", SINCE THE ECONOMY IS GENERALLY IN BETTER SHAPE THAN HERETOFORE AND ZIA'S OWN REPUTATION REMAINS HIGH.

5. MOST OF THE EDITORIALS ALSO EXPRESS THE HOPE THAT GEN. ZIA WILL TAKE FURTHER STEPS TO LIBERALIZE HIS REGIME, PARTICULARLY BY HOLDING PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. THE "HINDUSTAN TIMES" NOTES THAT THE PRESIDENTIAL

ELECTION WAS ONLY A "PRELIMINARY SKIRMISHING FOR THE REAL TUSSLE OF POWER AT THE COMING GENERAL ELECTION IN DECEMBER." THE "STATESMAN" CONCLUDES THAT "THE OUTCOME OF THE CONTEST IN DECEMBER - NOT BETWEEN PERSONALITIES, BUT BETWEEN PARTIES - MAY MORE TRULY REFLECT THE STRENGTH OF THE AWAMI LEAGUE AND ITS ALLIES." THE "NATIONAL HERALD" OBSERVED THAT GEN. ZIA IS IN A BETTER POSITION TO LIBERALIZE HIS GOVERNMENT THAN IS HIS OPPOSITE NUMBER IN PAKISTAN. THE "TIMES OF INDIA" CAUTIONS THAT GEN. ZIA "MUST NOT BE VINDICTIVE TOWARD HIS OPPONENTS...WHO ARE TOO NUMEROUS TO BE SUPPRESSED." PERHAPS HIS OPPONENTS WILL BE MORE WILLING TO COOPERATE WITH HIM IF HE ENDS THE MARTIAL LAW AND CEASES BEING THE CHIEF OF THE ARMY STAFF TO BECOME UNCLASSIFIED

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A TRULY CIVILIAN PRESIDENT."

5. MOST DELHI PAPERS CARRY BRIEF ACCOUNTS OF GEN. ZIA'S JUNE 5 PRESS CONFERENCE FOLLOWING HIS VICTORY AND FEATURE PROMINENTLY HIS EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE ABOUT CONTINUING IMPROVEMENT IN INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS. HE IS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT HE WOULD TRY TO "IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH EVERY COUNTRY" AND SO FAR AS INDIA IS CONCERNED "OUR RELATIONS ARE IMPROVING AND SUCH IMPROVEMENT IS A CONTINUING PROCESS." THE DELHI NEWSPAPERS ALSO REPORT THAT PRIME MINISTER DESAI TELEPHONED GEN. ZIA TO CONGRATULATE HIM ON HIS VICTORY AND LATER SENT HIM A TELEGRAM. PRESIDENT SANJIVA REDDY IS ALSO REPORTED TO HAVE SENT A MESSAGE OF CONGRATULATIONS.

6. WE WILL REPORT FURTHER INDIAN REACTION TO THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN COMING DAYS.
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